

CHILD WELFARE IN *Newsletter* PROGRESS

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NEW COMPUTER SYSTEM WILL SPEED UP WORK FLOW

Child welfare workers across the province will have a new computer tool to help them when the Child Welfare Act is proclaimed on July 1. This is the Child Welfare Information System (CWIS), to which every Alberta Social Services and Community Health district office will have access.

Child welfare information has, in fact, been stored on a computer since 1981. But the system has limitations. For instance, input is not direct; information is written on a form and sent to Edmonton for filing in the database. This can cause delays. Also, errors may not be caught and corrected for some time.

With CWIS, each district office will have its own terminal. Child welfare workers, or clerical staff, will be able to input data into the computer themselves, verifying immediately that it is correct. This will ensure that data on file is current and error-free.

The new system has several other features not previously available. Most significantly, with a terminal in each district office, child welfare workers will no longer have to telephone Edmonton to obtain certain types of information: they can call it up on their office terminals.

The system incorporates a foster home profile. With this feature, a social worker can enter details into the computer concerning a child requiring a foster home. The computer will respond with a list of foster homes that might be suitable. The system doesn't make the decision on

which foster home to select; but it does give the social worker the information needed to make a decision.

CWIS also stores case plans and court documents. These will be available directly to management, thus reducing the number of requests for plans and documents now made by managers to staff members.

Managers will also be able to use the system to identify service gaps. For example, they will be able to determine how many children need residential resources, and then check to see if enough resources are available to meet the need.

"The system is being built to enhance the day-to-day work of child welfare staff," explains Myrna Lee, the user project manager for CWIS. "Workers can have the computer in their office print out a case plan that can be presented in court. Or, they can have quick access to information before making an investigation. Workers can discover the department's

past involvement with a child, and the outcome, thus making it possible to pick up any patterns of behaviour.

"The system allows workers to determine the movements of a particular child, the services used in the case, and the progress – or lack of progress – made by the department with that child."

Because much of the information on file is confidential, CWIS has its own security system. Passwords are needed for certain files. Information, once put into the system, cannot be erased. Also, not everyone will have access to all files. For example, staff involved in planning, who need statistical data only, will not have access to names.

More features are being planned for incorporation into CWIS. These could include a system whereby the computer will search for available services suitable for a particular child, and then produce a comparison of the costs and effectiveness of those services.

30,000 INFORMATION PACKAGES EXPLAIN ACT

Basic information on the new Child Welfare Act and how it will affect different groups is contained in a series of orientation packages that is now being compiled.

The packages will go to groups which are either involved with family and children's services, or which have an interest in the Act.

There are five different packages in the

series with each one providing a special explanation of the implications of the new Act for a specific interest group. The five groups are law enforcement agencies, child development and service agencies, residential resources providing care to children, native groups, and foster parents and foster parent applicants.

"In all, some 15,000 packages will be

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REGIONS TO HAVE OWN CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN

The search is on for six regional children's guardians to assist Dr. Herb Sohn, recently named Children's Guardian for the province.

"The success of this experiment in guardianship will depend on the capabilities of the seven of us – the children's guardians in each of the six regions and myself. So, in selecting guardians for the regions, I am putting emphasis on the need to obtain capable people with proven ability," said Dr. Sohn. "We've advertised within Alberta Social Services and Community Health. If six people cannot be found within the department, the search will be continued outside."

The criteria for these six important positions are broad. They include knowledge of child welfare and child development, familiarity with Alberta's child welfare system and its procedures; demonstrated ability as a guardian or advocate, negotiating and planning skills, written and oral communication skills, and knowledge of Alberta's health and social services network.

Dr. Sohn hopes to have hired the six regional guardians by the end of May. "Then," he said, "it would be wonderful if we could have these people on board before July 1, the date of the new Act's proclamation. They would have time to

get oriented, and to get involved in the process of planning and decision-making."

However, before the six regional children's guardians can start work, space has to be found for them.

Says Dr. Sohn: "We want them to be accessible to child welfare personnel, but clearly they have to be independent. We're looking for separate accommodation, although in some regions that may not be possible. We may have to arrange accommodation so that the indication of independence is clear, even if our offices are in the same building as those for child welfare personnel."

CWIP TEAM GETTING SET FOR LONG-TERM PROJECTS

The Child Welfare Implementation Project (CWIP) team will not be disbanding when the new Child Welfare Act is proclaimed on July 1. It will merely switch the thrust of its activity from short-term to long-term projects.

When the team was assembled in October 1984, its task was to address the major issues in the child welfare system over a five-year period. Short- and long-term projects were identified. The former were related to implementation of the Act upon its proclamation. These short-term projects must be finished by July 1, or earlier.

After July 1, attention will be turned

to long-term projects, covering a broad range of activity. They are:

- Identifying and resolving issues concerning the continuum of services to children and their families in the community. Implementation is scheduled for 1986.
- Identifying, by April 1986, a range of basic and standardized services for children and their families.
- Developing a case management and supervision system. Implementation is scheduled for June 1987.

- Monitoring and evaluating the legislative and program changes brought about by the new Act.
- Analysing current sources and allocations of child welfare funding, examining the implications of the new legislation on this funding and making appropriate recommendations. The project will include an analysis of the costs and savings associated with implementation of the new Child Welfare Act.
- Developing an optimal organizational framework for the delivery of child welfare services. Implementation is scheduled for May 1987.

CWIP HOLDS 88 MEETINGS IN FOUR MONTHS

A meeting held, to explain a project, answer questions and resolve problems can be effective communication. The Child Welfare Implementation Project (CWIP) team has been putting this aphorism into practice during the last few months – and doing it very effectively.

According to Celeste Grad, the CWIP manager responsible for communications, 88 meetings were held across the province in a period of four months for people who are going to be affected by the new Child Welfare Act. In total, more than 2,000 people attended these meetings. Close to 1,200 were staff members with Alberta Social Services and Community Health; the remainder were representatives from community resource agencies and organizations.

Most of the meetings were initiated by the department. However, 26 were initiated by other organizations. "This is very encouraging," says Grad, "as it speaks to the common level of interest for involvement in the change process."

Until the end of February, the meetings concentrated on helping people orient themselves to the Act and to the activities of CWIP. "Initially, this did cause concern; audiences were anxious to receive more content-specific information which was not immediately available" said Grad. "But we have endeavored to make people aware of resolved policy issues quickly. This has minimized some of the anxiety that existed concerning the changes, especially among staff."

The meetings are not over. Comments Grad: "The job is far from complete. Proclamation of the legislation on July 1 will generate a renewed need and commitment to address a host of questions that may, as yet, be unresolved."

If you require additional copies of the Newsletter, or know of an individual or group that would like to receive future issues, please telephone Joyce Garipey at 422-5187, Edmonton or write to Child Welfare Implementation Project, 9th floor, Seventh Street Plaza, 10030 - 107 St., Edmonton, Alberta T5J 3E4.

HANDBOOK EXPLAINS ACT

This month, a handbook is being distributed to help child welfare workers understand and implement the new Child Welfare Act. It is the result of the work and interest of many people throughout Alberta. "Everyone we asked to review the draft of the handbook sent us a submission," said Dave Moncrieff, a Child Welfare Implementation Project (CWIP) manager.

Development of the handbook involved regional Child Welfare staff; legal, policy and service personnel; communications consultants; and the Lesser Slave Lake Indian Regional Council.

Altogether, more than 200 pages of submissions came in to the CWIP office in Edmonton, most of them asking for

clarification of a specific point or for additional information.

One request was for clarification of a "day". A definition was inserted in the handbook because, in law, what is meant by a day can depend on a number of things. CWIP also added a glossary of legal terms to help child welfare workers interpret the Act's legal language.

"We had to clarify hundreds of little issues for the handbook," said Moncrieff. "Even so, we couldn't deal with some concerns because they depend on the outcome of court decisions."

The handbook contains sections on the intent of the Act, establishes departmental policy where required, and addresses delegation of authority. There is also a section containing forms to be used.

The content of the handbook follows the sequence of the Act. It is, thus, easy to find a reference in the handbook to a particular section of the Act. However, to ensure quick access to information, the handbook has both an alphabetical and a chronological index.

To ensure easy handling, the volume's text pages are three-hole punched and inserted in a ring binder. This arrangement will also allow the addition of new information pages – on the regulations, for instance – as they become available.

The handbook information will be supplemented by the addition of a program manual which will be available by July 1. The program manual has more detailed information concerning procedural issues than the handbook.

STAFF TRAINING TO IMPLEMENT NEW ACT TOOK A YEAR TO PLAN

Because the new Child Welfare Act represents such a major change in the direction of child welfare policy in the province, the training of staff to implement the legislation is a long and complex undertaking. "The Act has so much content that we have to be sure child welfare staff fully understand it, and also understand the ramifications it will have on their jobs," says Mat Hanrahan, a Child Welfare Implementation Project (CWIP) manager.

The status of the training program is this: 88 child welfare supervisors have completed their eight days of training, and the training of 600 child welfare workers has started. The latter will undergo a six-day program, working in groups of about 20 people.

Asked for Extra Training

District office managers will go through the same six-day training program as child welfare workers, and then, in mid-June, will attend a special two-day workshop. "This workshop is a new development in the training package," says Hanrahan. "The district office managers came to the CWIP team and asked for the extra training – they wanted to know how the new Act will affect their role as managers, and how it will change the responsibilities of their staff."

Training

District office managers, child welfare supervisors and workers are not the only staff in Alberta Social Services and Community Health to receive special training on the new Child Welfare Act. All told, more than 3,100 people in the department will go through some sort of training or orientation program.

To undertake this extensive and comprehensive task, 45 staff members have been specially trained to act as instructors. These 45 people include managers, supervisors, and child welfare workers. They were seconded from their jobs to provide this province-wide training project in mid-March.

Program has 18 Modules

The development of the training packages started almost a year ago, commented Mat Hanrahan. First, the individuals involved in writing the Act, together with a number of child welfare staff from across the province, combed through the legislation to identify areas they saw as being new or different from what was previously in place.

These areas were then sorted into groups of topics, such as court work, or case planning. The next step was to develop 18 distinct training modules.

"We built our lesson plans and structures around the Child Protective Services (CPS) training that every child welfare worker receives when starting with Alberta Social Services and Community Health," said Hanrahan.

"CPS training is chiefly practice-based and clinically oriented. While some of the training for the new Child Welfare Act has modules that use this approach – such as training on case planning and agreements – much of it will be oriented to teaching policies that flow from the Act."

Child welfare workers will learn about new court requirements, documentation changes such as different forms, and be introduced to new timeframes and other operational details inherent in the Act.

Learning Presentation Skills

"Once we had determined what we wanted to teach, we had to determine how to teach it," said Hanrahan. The CWIP team went for guidance to Alberta Social Services and Community Health's staff development group. The group had previously developed a 2½-day course on presentation skills.

The 45 trainers, about half of whom had little training experience, took this

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STAFF TRAINING TO IMPLEMENT NEW ACT TOOK A YEAR TO PLAN

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course. It included the use of videotaping and extensive critiquing. "They all expected to be traumatized by the videotaping," said Hanrahan. "But, when it was all over, they found that it hadn't been so bad, and that they had learned a great deal about presentation techniques."

The CWIP team also called upon the expertise of the department's staff already involved in CPS training. They helped develop lesson plans and evaluation forms; some, in fact, also helped with active training. "This sustained a good connection between the CWIP team and CPS trainers," commented Hanrahan.

"Now CPS trainers will easily be able to change the content of their courses to reflect the implications of the new Act."

Help from a Hot Line

Because of the extent of the changes

to the Act being presented in the training sessions, CWIP has set up a hot line to help trainers.

"Say you're conducting a training session in Peace River," theorized Hanrahan, "and a trainee asks you a question you can't answer. With the hot line, you can call your training team leader in the regional office. If the regional office doesn't have the answer, you can call the CWIP office in Edmonton. We'll have someone always on hand to respond to whatever the question or concern may be. We'll also be able to offer policy interpretations."

Training after July 1

The present training program, as comprehensive as it may be, is not regarded as being an end in itself. The CWIP team is already planning additional training to start in the fall.

Says Hanrahan: "Right now, we're identifying areas that staff want further training to cover. For example, training modules have been asked for on developing goals and objectives with clients, and on cross-cultural native awareness."

However, he added, there are still a lot of evaluations to come in from trainers and trainees. And these will provide directions for the fall program.

One thing seems certain. "The next training round will be more systematic, in smaller groups probably," concludes Hanrahan. "The regions will be more involved in developing training sessions and programs to meet their needs."

The marvel with the training program to be concluded before the proclamation of the Child Welfare Act on July 1, is that it has provided so much information for so many people in so short a time.

Two-day Training Program will help 6,000 Foster Parents

Personnel within Alberta Social Services and Community Health are not the only people who will receive formal training on the new Child Welfare Act and its implications.

Before July 1, when the Act is proclaimed, the presidents of Foster Parent Associations and their provincial executive will be provided with a 1½-day orientation program. Approximately 50 people will be involved.

In the fall, the department, working in co-operation with the Foster Parents Association, will provide a two-day orientation to some 6,000 foster parents. Says Alf Nobert, a Child Welfare Implementation Project (CWIP) manager: "We would like to have trained foster parents before July 1, but there just hasn't been enough time to make the arrangements for so many people, scattered throughout the province."

Various child welfare agencies and similar groups affected by the Act will receive orientation packages (see separate story in this newsletter). "The formal training being given to the staff of Alberta Social Services and Community Health is not applicable to these groups," said Nobert. "But if they have questions or concerns, the department's regional staff will be able to help."

30,000 INFORMATION PACKAGES EXPLAIN ACT

Continued

distributed," says Alf Nobert, a Child Welfare Implementation Project (CWIP) manager. The CWIP team in Edmonton is assembling the packages, and will send them to regional offices for distribution to interested groups as identified by regional staff. Distribution is expected to be completed during the first two weeks of June.

Packages will also be distributed to all district office managers, case work supervisors and staff.

The five package types contain a number of common elements, including:

- a message from the Minister of Alberta Social Services and Community Health,
- a discussion on the intent of the new Act,
- some background on the history of the Act's development,
- a glossary explaining various terms in the Act,
- a definition of a child in need of protective services,
- information on the role of the Children's Guardian, and
- directions on how to obtain more information on the Act and its implications.

The logo for the Government of Alberta, featuring the word "Alberta" in a stylized, bold, sans-serif font.

SOCIAL SERVICES
AND COMMUNITY HEALTH